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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LAMENT ON RULING PARTY TACTICS

Classified By: A/DCM Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Just Russia (SR) candidate and Duma Deputy Aleksey Mitrofanov detailed for us how regional leaders, in their efforts to engineer a mandate for the Putin-led United Russia party, were using administrative resources and other tactics to thwart opposition political campaigns. Mitrofanov confirmed press accounts that SR was being dealt with harshly in St. Petersburg. In Penza, where Mitrofanov runs the SR campaign, all local television stations have cited "force majeure" in canceling agreements to run SR ads and all local firms have refused to display the party's campaign banners. Mitrofanov dismissed recent efforts to build momentum for Putin to become Russia's "national leader" after his term ends, as part of the United Russia party's "clueless" campaign. He predicted that Putin himself would engage personally and very publicly in the days before the December 2 Duma elections in order to move United Russia's take of the vote closer to the 70 percent mark. End summary.

Regional Pressure
on All Other Parties

¶2. (C) In a November 9 meeting, Just Russia (SR) candidate and Duma Deputy Aleksey Mitrofanov described obstacles encountered as he attempted to mastermind his party's campaign for votes in the December 2 Duma elections in the Penza region. (Note: Mitrofanov, one of the better known politicians in Russia, left Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR as the parties were organizing for the fall campaign, allegedly because he thought the long-term prospects of a personality-driven party were not good.) In the seventeen years he had been involved in politics, Mitrofanov said he had not encountered such active interference from local authorities. He did not believe that the campaign against the "opposition" political parties was centrally directed. He suspected that the regions believed that they had to deliver about 70 percent of the vote to United Russia (YR), and that they were going about that task in "their usual primitive way."

¶3. (C) As an example of the roadblocks being thrown up, Mitrofanov pointed to contracts signed for paid political advertising with two Penza television stations. Both had recently refused to honor their agreements, citing "force majeure," which Mitrofanov took to mean the appearance of Putin at the head of the YR list, and the failure of YR, after an initial surge in the polls following Putin's announcement, to further improve its ratings. (Mitrofanov was not talking about the airtime allotted to each of the parties free-of-charge by the Central Election Commission as part of the official media campaign, but about additional, paid advertising.) SR had also been rebuffed in its efforts in Penza to find a firm willing to hang its banners. SR would sue, Mitrofanov said, but with the vote only three weeks away the damage had been done.

14. (C) Mitrofanov confirmed media reports alleging that SR's campaign had been sabotaged in St. Petersburg. As reported in the national daily Kommersant, during the night of November 1 - 2, SR posters were removed from city buses while the buses were in their garages and buses still affixed with SR advertisements were not allowed to circulate around the city. In addition, the responsible advertising agency told SR that it would not honor its contract. SR efforts to file suit were effectively sabotaged when the Directorate for Combating Tax Fraud confiscated the computer servers of the advertising agency. SR Chairman Sergey Mironov termed his party's problems in St. Petersburg, "the crudest violation of electoral law."

15. (C) Per Mitrofanov, SR is experiencing similar problems in numerous regions of Russia, although not of the magnitude of St. Petersburg. The Union of Right Forces (SPS) has had large amounts of campaign literature confiscated, while LDPR, the Communist Party (KPRF), and Yabloko have been victims of regional leaders' enthusiasm as well. Mitrofanov thought that SR, with its roots in the Kremlin, was getting the same treatment as parties with less of an official pedigree because some in the Kremlin thought that Mironov's Chairmanship of the Federation Council would make SR less pliant if it were well represented in the Duma.

United Russia:
No Ideas, Only Putin

16. (C) Mitrofanov ascribed YR's stalled campaign to the party's uninspired leadership and the lack of a program that extended beyond their success in affiliating themselves with Putin. The lackluster campaign, he noted, had been the

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subject of Presidential Administration Deputy Surkov's rebuke of YR members earlier in the week. They had reportedly been urged by Surkov to campaign more actively in the regions, and not count on Putin alone to sweep them into the Duma. Later in the conversation, Mitrofanov dismissed recent efforts to generate a groundswell of support for Putin as "national leader" when his term expires, as a YR campaign tactic.

"They know only Putin, Putin, Putin," he said.

(Not-so-spontaneous rallies calling variously for a third term or for Putin to become Russia's "national leader" have been held in Saratov, Volgograd, Rostov, Kaliningrad, Omsk and, on November 8, in Moscow. Organizers project that on November 15, the movement's initiators will assemble in Tver region to launch a "For Putin" movement.) Putin, Mitrofanov thought, had nothing to do with the effort, but would not be averse to milking it if it showed promise. He described Putin's approach to such efforts as "feng shui politics."

"He will arrange and re-arrange the furniture, until it coalesces into a pattern that he finds productive."

Mitrofanov predicted that Putin would engage forcefully in the waning days of the campaign in order to move United Russia to the 70 percent victory mark.

17. (C) Campaign headaches notwithstanding, Mitrofanov thought SR, KPRF and, just possibly, LDPR would cross the seven percent threshold to representation in the Duma. (Note: Polling continues to show Just Russia holding at four-five percent of the vote.) He agreed with the common wisdom that the Communists were under somewhat less pressure than the other parties. Less interference, and the possibility that the Communists would benefit from a protest vote, would translate into more than ten percent on election day. As evidence that the KPRF was getting the kid-glove treatment, Mitrofanov pointed to what he said was the party's "Achilles heel": its fat cats, among whom he counted Sergey Muravlenko (USD 100 million), Svetlana Savitskaya (6 buildings, 5 cars), and Zhores Alferov (USD 1 million). More media attention was being given to the KPRF's historical legacy (Lenin, Stalin), which has "no effect on Russian voters," than to the

accumulated wealth of its leadership, which if widely known
"would trigger mass defections from the party."

Comment

18. (C) Mitrofanov is the quintessential politician; cynical, which is the Russian version of realistic. He left LDPR, because he felt that the number of people who subscribe to Zhirinovskiy's ethos of outraged nationalism and profane disgust towards the status quo was declining with Russia's increasing prosperity. He is used to the rough-and-tumble of politics here, and has been on the receiving end in earlier campaigns, so his surprise this time around is indication that Putin's decision to dip his toe into politics has created a tidal wave in the overeager regions.
BURNS